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AMA-SX

Whoops...

Stunning shot of Austin Forkner getting it all wrong through the Anaheim whoops last Saturday. The rookie was lucky to avoid injury and actually recovered from the spill on his 250SX debut to make the top eight. Much more to come from the 24

Photo by Simon Cudby/Rich Shepherd





DAKAR

Epic...

Wide open landscape, roost trails and tracks, a solitary motorcycle tackling the elements and a low-flying helicopter: it can only be the Dakar. With Toby Price crashing out and Honda, Husky and Yamaha still looking strong the Rally is anybody's with just a few days to go

Photo by MCH Photo/Monster Energy







Glammed up...

A different sandy prospect and the annual Monster Energy 'party' in the vast playground that is Glamis Dunes saw the 'Doonies 3' video released last week. Click on the link to see some absurdities with girls, sand and fast, flying machinery

Photo by Monster Energy





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AMA-SX

LOS ANGELES, ANAHEIM
ANGEL STADIUM • JANUARY 7th

450SX winner: Ken Roczen, Honda

250SX West Coast winner: Shane McElrath, KTM

ROCZEN RAMPANT AT A1 ONCE MORE

By Steve Matthes/Andrea Wilson
Photos by Simon Cudby/Rich Shepherd





De Coster, Fahie, Glover and Honda boss Dan Betley look on as Roczen takes the chequers; could this finally be the German's year indoors?



Well, well, well that Anaheim one race was something else huh? The 2017 Monster Energy Supercross series kicked off at the familiar Big A in Anaheim, California and had a little bit of the 'expected' and 'unexpected'. Like a bag of Halloween candy that's got those delicious Kit-Kat's but also someone threw an apple or banana in there. The 450SX class was the Kit-Kat and the 250SX class was the banana. Or maybe it was just all bananas period?

'I'm just keeping my head on my shoulders and bring that focus every single weekend because I feel like in the previous years I've kind of got a little bit too anxious and rushed a little bit. I don't want that to happen this year,' Honda's Ken Roczen told me after the main event where he snatched the holeshot and led every lap of the new-format timed 20 minutes-plus-one (that ironically went 20 laps) to be the early point man in the series.

We knew Roczen would be good coming into the season but this good? Maybe not. Roczen beat Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey by a whopping sixteen seconds, which was one of the bigger Anaheim 1 beat-downs in recent memory. The unusual-for-supercross move of wearing a suit into the season opening press conference was no longer being talked about. Instead it was all about Roczen, his new 2017 CRF450 and the annihilation.

'The biggest thing is that I have no doubt in my mind (that I can win), but at the same time I'm staying really calm and trusting my capabilities and what I've done in the last few months, and especially the trust that I have in the team and the people around me,' Roczen said. 'It's been a ton of fun. Everybody is in good vibes. I love getting good results. I love putting a smile on everybody's face. That helps out a lot. Obviously tonight went amazing.'

For his part Dungey wasn't panicking after one race, he's been in this game way too long to do that. All day Dungey didn't look 'Dungey-like' placing fifth and seventh in the two practices and finishing second to Roczen in the heat. In the main though he slowly worked his way up past teammate Marvin Musquin and a struck-by-arm-pump Monster Energy Kawasaki's Eli Tomac to easily take second. Sixteen seconds or .6 seconds, Dungey knows that a second is a second. Musquin rode well to finish third and continued his strong off-season right into the regular season. Marvin qualified fastest on the day as well so that's got to be comforting.

As far as Tomac, he looked great in getting into second early and pulling away from Dungey and Musquin. The runner-up spot appeared to be his for the taking before dreaded arm-pump arrived. Tomac slid backwards fast and that's not a good sign for anyone over on the green team. Maybe it's a one-week thing or perhaps this is a start of something bigger. Tomac won his heat though if you want to look at the positive side. Rockstar Husky's Jason Anderson took fourth with a nice ride from a ways back.

In the 250SX class it was all about Monster Pro Circuit's Austin Forkner or Star Yamaha's Aaron Plessinger or perhaps GEICO Honda's Jeremy Martin as the heavy hitters. No one was talking about TLD KTM's Shane McElrath and that's on us "experts" I suppose. Shane's been a bit under the radar his whole career, he's a hard working rider, quiet and while he's been on the podium before, he's never been looked at as a title-winning contender. Don't hate on me but that's the facts. His teammates like Cole Seely, Jessy Nelson and even Mitchell Oldenburg can-or-could wow you with speed but Shane's in shape, he's fast and he's mature out there. Rarely do you see McElrath make a dumb move or lose his composure on the track.

SUPERCROSS: ANAHEIM 1



McElrath continues A1's trend of throwing-up an unexpected winner but the KTM man will have been working with Tyla Ratray behind the scenes and his form is easily capable of being more than just a 'blip'





It's easy to forget that Musquin started his first 450SX season last year with an injury. The Frenchman is quietly impressive and seemingly always in the mix. Third place was a bright launch to the campaign and if there is one rider in the pack that could launch a few surprises then look no further than the '25'

At Anaheim, he won his heat and that had us going 'hmmm...' in the press box and then he led every single lap of the 250SX main to take his first victory of his career and fifth podium.

'The last probably month the media has been out at the track and everybody's been talking,' said Shane. 'It's easy to kind of get caught up in that but at the same time we've been working for four months and we've had two or three little breaks. So we've definitely put in our work. I think it was beneficial to come in under the radar.'

Was he for real? Sure, why not? He's a veteran of the class, he's got a great bike and as I said, he doesn't make mistakes so he can maintain a spot on the podium while some of the others, potentially faster, make those errors.

Plessinger was very quick and charged up from a so-so start to close on McElrath. The tall, lanky Plessinger kills it in the whoops and at Anaheim the two sets weren't a real separator but he looked good racing up to the TLD rider. Martin Davalos won his heat, ran second for a while but fell off the pace of the top two. McElrath's teammate Oldenburg was fourth and further back were a couple of green speedsters that we'll be hearing from before this series is done.

Pro Circuit Kawasaki teammates Justin Hill and Austin Forkner were looking fiesty and moving up when Forkner slowed a bit in the whoops while behind Hill, dropped his front end and did a perfect somersault. From there the rookie got up and set the fastest time on the fourteenth lap to salvage an eighth. Afterwards Forkner admitted that he was nervous in his first ever supercross.

Fastest qualifier Jeremy Martin's race was over ten feet out of the gate with his poor start. Martin looked good in racing from twelfth on the opening lap but a sixth on the night was about all the #6 could do after that the gate drop.

So one round down, sixteen to go. It's dangerous to make assumptions or write someone off after one meeting but one race can be a sign if you look close enough. For sure there are some really fast riders like Jeremy Martin, Cooper Webb and more wondering what exactly happened to their best laid plans.

The German on the Honda though, he's got to be thinking this all went perfectly. Next week San Diego and I can't wait.







Second place for Dungey meant not a single bookie had cause to worry at A1. It remains to be seen whether several of his rivals can start to match his level of performance every seven days

NEW YEAR, NEW FORMAT

By Andrea Wilson

With the New Year came a new race format for the Monster Energy AMA Supercross season – a switch to time plus one lap instead of set laps themselves. Even though the change was sprung on the riders at late notice, less than a month before the season opener, the consensus was positive. Although it's a change for supercross, it's the norm for motocross. The only concern was adding more laps to a supercross track; which turned out to not be much of a concern for the top dogs, including the reigning champion himself.

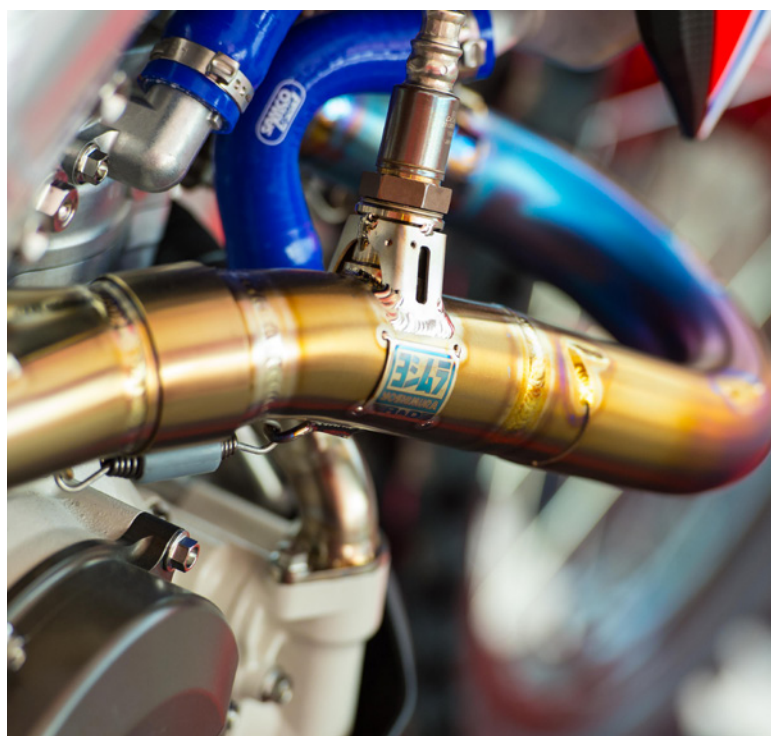
"I think it's good," Ryan Dungey said. "It's different as far as a mental approach. But in reality it's just going to be more laps and shorter in other areas that are over a minute. But you know whichever way it's going to be, it is what it is. And we train to go the distance and to go that length anyways."

In the end for both the 250 and 450 class at Anaheim, the track generated the same lap count.

"It was actually funny, I think it ended up being 20 laps," Roczen said. "It was perfect so I think we're going to see a bunch of races where the lap times are going to be a lot shorter, so it will be closer to 25 laps, but at the same time, 'time' will never change. I'm fit so the longer the better."

So what's the fuss? What's that old adage? The more things change the more they stay the same? What it can change is more consistency in the timing of the event, and as veteran Chad Reed hopes, more diverse tracks that aren't trying to manipulate the end game.

"I'm hopeful that the tracks improve," Reed said. "I think the things that they do to slow us down to try to get the numbers back up to around a minute, hopefully now we can just have what I call 'normal' tracks. And then just let us race. I think 20 minutes is a good number. I think 20 plus 1 will be around 22. So... Yeah, personally I'm excited about the 20 laps. I think when you start running around the 45-48 second laps and then you've got individuals that are as fast as all these guys, it can be difficult with a bad start. I think 20 minutes is going to set the benchmark and will kind of separate the men from the boys. Yeah, I pray for big whoops and long motos."



SUPERCROSS: ANAHEIM 1



Some food for thought for Cooper Webb at the Angle Stadium but a top ten finish in the 250SX West Coast Champ's first 450 outing was hardly a disaster







MAKING A STATEMENT: KR

By Andrea Wilson

Ken Roczen showed up to the annual AMA Supercross Anaheim season opener pre-race press conference dressed to impress. But while the Team Honda HRC rider had tongues wagging by waltzing in with a tailored suit instead of the expected team gear, he let his performance on Saturday night do all the talking. Roczen's third Anaheim I win in four years (and with three different teams/brands) was an absolute masterclass performance. He led from start to finish and crossed the line an impressive 16.2 seconds over rival and reigning champ Ryan Dungey.

Roczen set the tone – a calm, poised, collected athlete who knocked down the laps on a track where cooler heads prevailed. It certainly made a statement.

It's your third win in four years here. Do you feel any different as far as your prospects for the championship after this one?

It's the first race, but I just stayed really calm. I think that's why in the previous years I kind of got a little too excited in the beginning, but really keeping calm and loose and just keep my eyes on the prize and click off each and every weekend. I think it's important to take this race and enjoy tonight and tomorrow, but it's important to look ahead and focus on the next race and not get caught up too much with the last one.

Did you expect to get the reception that you got and people making a big deal about you showing up in a suit on Thursday?

Yeah, I kind of thought that people were going to think that it was different. But I just feel it

was the right thing to do. I want to elevate the sport, try to take it up a notch. All the other big sports that people love, and that are pretty much bigger than us... I just want to burst the bubble here and hope that people catch on to it. That we start looking professional, respect the media, because we're getting dirty and sweaty tonight, but on Thursday there's no real need to. I was happy to get my custom suits from Stitched, I put that together a while ago. It felt good to wear nice things.



How was the dirt out there once everything raced in, was it easy to over-ride the dirt or did you have to keep it down a notch to make sure that you kept traction?

Absolutely. I thought it was going to get really good but it seems like from the stuff that they've mixed in in the morning which looked

like we needed it, there were no lines and it was just really crumbly. So I wasn't really too stoked with the dirt, to be honest, but it's the same for everybody and you just kind of need to adapt real quick.

Early in the race you ran a 1:01, 1:02. It looked like you found something. Was there something on the track you discovered early in the race?

Not really. I was kinda doing the same thing the entire time. I tried to find something different in the whoops, just a little bit of a different rhythm, so I tried to kind of jump it one time and that didn't work out at all. So I lost a little bit of ground and I just went back to what it was doing before and just took my time and tried not to rush them. Like Ryan [Dungey] said, they got really steep and like a curve. So if you messed up it could give you a pretty good kick and you might find yourself on the ground. So I just kind of kept doing the same thing I was doing. I felt like I could have gone actually faster then, but at the same time there was no need to really push the envelope.

It's technically your first race on the bike. You raced Monster Cup, a different type of Supercross track to here. Is there actually stuff you learned today since it is one of your first runs on it? Is there room to improve maybe?

Totally. I was hoping we would have a free practice because I haven't ridden since Tuesday so that's kinda long time. It just took a little bit of time to get used to it, especially coming on a track like that. It was really soft obviously in practice. Just kind of weird a little bit. But I wasn't stressing about it at all. I just made some tiny little adjustments and it worked out good. I wasn't really messing around with the bike too much because I'm really happy where I'm at. But at the moment I'm just having a lot of fun. The team is good and

they're working hard. It's all the details that make me super-happy. Right now there's really nothing to complain about.

Is this the type of race you like? To get out front, run your own race or do you prefer to have a battle?

It's a bit tough because sometimes you have a bigger gap and you tend to make little mistakes but it was nice to obviously have a gap. It just gives you a little bit of breathing room, but also there is enough time for error. Sometimes when you're battling with somebody it keeps your focus a little bit sharper but I had no problems tonight with that. It was fun because you couldn't really over-ride the track so I wasn't breathing hard or anything. It was one of those races that could have just kept going. It was good but I think in the near future we're going to see tracks a lot more tacky and we can push more. It's going to be a lot of fun. It was definitely a little bit of a different Anaheim than I've seen before.

You made a sixteen second gap with the win. Did you expect to come in so dominantly?

It's hard to expect something like that...but I can tell you that I had no doubt in my mind, and that's ultimately what helped me out a lot. But at the same time there are a lot of good guys out there. That's what I mean the entire time with keeping the focus. That's what I've done. I never got too excited. Just tried to stay calm and trust my capabilities.





Out on his own: Dean Wilson was one of the stories of Anaheim 1 and acquitted himself well from within the confines of a (relatively) humble Yamaha set-up. The future might not be immediately clear for the Brit but after two torrid years of knee injuries then #15 must be used to taking a race at a time. It will be interesting to see what he can do from this underdog role



With four wins Martin Davalos is one of the 250SX West Coast series' most decorated racers

SUPERCROSS: ANAHEIM 1



GETTING A1 ON ANAHEIM...

By Steve Matthes

Yeah you read the race report from the first round. The 'who did well and why's' are laid out but there was much more to Anaheim one than just the racing up front. Let's dive into the reasons behind the results and offer up our usual hot takes...

-The biggest panic button to be dished out was probably to Cooper Webb. The rookie Yamaha factory rider didn't do too badly on paper with his tenth but he was far off the pace. JGR Suzuki's Jake Weimer beat him in the semi race and in the main he was powerless to stop Josh Grant and a few others from riding away. Juxtapose Webb's ride against another hot 250SX prospect like Jason Anderson's second at Anaheim a couple of years ago and you wonder what's up but hey, it's only one race. The word with Webb is that early on he struggled with setting up the 450 but apparently it's been better lately. Cooper will figure it out but A1 wasn't one to remember for him.

-What of his teammate Chad Reed? The veteran didn't impress in qualifying but a solid third in the heat set him up for the Main nicely. From there he got a so-so start and could never get going. The 22, curiously brought out second last to Dungey in opening ceremonies showing that the people still love him, got stuck behind JGR Suzuki's Weston Peick and was trying anything and everything to get by. Finally Reed resorted to a hard pass and according to Reed hit Peick as "hard as I've ever hit anyone" and nothing happened to the Suzuki rider! Unfortunately for Chad though he smashed his waterpump and

that was it. A DNF at the opening round is a bummer way for him and Yamaha to start.

-We knew before the race that there was a good possibility of a highly paid factory rider missing the 450SX main event. When you jotted down everyone on paper, the field was too stacked to ensure everyone made it in. And you just knew that with crashes and strength of heat and semi races that a privateer or two would make it. Well at Anaheim it was Rockstar Husqvarna's Christophe Pourcel who got the boot as he came up just short in the 450SX LCQ. Pourcel crashed in the heat, got a bad start in the semi and then couldn't get by another highly paid factory rider in Trey Canard in the LCQ. Just like that he was watching the main event while privateers Nick Schmidt and Jimmy Albertson made the cut.

-Speaking of Canard, he clipped a front wheel on a jump and was forced to step off his new KTM ride in practice. After that he was not the same guy and decided after the parade lap of the main event that was it for him. A shoulder seems to be the problem for the #41 and we'll see if it puts him on the sidelines for any amount of time.

-Blake Baggett debuted his new KTM ride with the RMA TVMC guys and looked pretty impressive in the heat finishing second behind Eli Tomac. Unfortunately for Baggett he crashed in the first turn (or shortly after) and was way back but he rode well all night. You just won't read much about it.



-No Justin Barcia for Anaheim as he announced through his own press release (not the team's which was...weird) that he hurt his wrist and would be forced off the bike for at least four races. So Jake Weimer gets that spot and as noted, did pretty well for two days on the bike.

-Malcolm Stewart should be showing up this weekend or next on the privateer Suzuki. Both Stewart and Dean Wilson turned down the four race deal for Barcia due to sponsor commitments. Wilson's hoping to race the first five and have Yamaha put him on the truck and Stewart's got sponsors lined up he didn't want to disappoint by leaving.

-Speaking of Stewart, older brother James released an IG statement about how strange it is for him to not be on the line for Anaheim 1 and how he's hoping to come back and race at some point. And I imagine it will be with brother Malcolm under some sort of set-up. Not sure what bike it will be (I'm guessing Yamaha) but I hope he puts some real effort into coming back and tries to get some of the magic. James said in his post "For those that tried to break me, sorry, you can't get rid of me that easy". I get the feeling of not being wanted or whatever James is alluding to here but he did it to himself! If he had results equal to what he had in 2014, there would be no one to "break him"...they would just want to be breaking him off a check! His results last year were so bad for what he made (some of it due to injuries) that no one wanted to pay him until they can see that he's back to being, you know, James Stewart. I'm never a

fan of a millionaire rider saying that people are holding him back from racing because as Reed's shown, you can always take your own money and motivation and get out there to show people you've still got it. Stay tuned on this one.



PRODUCTS

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At the start of 2017 and 100% cannot be missed. Not only are athletes like Marvin Musquin and Cooper Webb keeping the moto goggles in full public view at Anaheim but the Dakar Rally is also ensuring that the Racecraft and Accuri eyewear (particularly with the Forecast rain/mud system) is prevalent. Just before the AMA Supercross opener the San Diego firm announced their official apparel link-up with Geico Honda which means a host of jackets, sweatshirts, t-shirts, headwear and collectibles (bags, umbrellas, decals, air fresheners!) in that distinctive red and black theme. The company continue to spread across the disciplines – from racing and cycling to apparel, bicycle helmets and sunglasses and performance eyewear – but the Geico deal cements their ‘moto’ roots. Prices range from 120-50 dollars and the red hooded puff jacket has to be our pick. 100% and Geico Honda have been affiliated for three years now and the bond has grown tighter with the first licenced deal for the revered goggle brand.

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Evolution 2.0, Lite Hydrogen, Kinetic (Lite, Relapse, Crux, Trifecta Mesh, Rockstar and Women's themes), F-16, Patrol (XC, Off-road designs) constitute the vast collection of riding gear from Fly Racing, meaning a multitude of performing fabrics and different price points depending on how serious you might be about your riding. The Evolution 2.0 is the pick of the lot (thanks to more than ten years of development) and comes in five different schemes and would have been noticeable on athletes like Trey Canard at Anaheim last weekend. The jersey costs 55 dollars and has multidirectional lycra, full mesh back and laser-cut perforations as well as low profile multi panel construction. The pants (175 dollars) use the interesting Boa closure system, like a dial ratchet system for the best comfort and is simple and easy to adjust. 600D construction mean that the garment is tough and will last, and the combination of lycra, ventilation, and Kevlar heat resistant panels form the rest of the product that also has a raft of other small attributes like further zipped ventilation possibilities, interior waistband pocket, zipper lock system and relaxed leg cuffs for effective boot fitting. The Evolution gloves (37 dollars) complete the set with the same stretch fabric and double layer vented palm and elements like a 'split' knuckle construction.

As we said Evolution 2.0 is one of just a myriad of options offered by Fly but some appealing designs and differing levels means there is easily something for every biker.

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By Adam Wheeler
Photos as credited

A FINE LINE

LEVELS OF CONCENTRATION BETWEEN MOTOCROSS & ROAD RACING

MOTOCROSS AND ROAD RACING ARE TWO SPORTS AT POLAR OPPOSITES OF THE TWO WHEELED SPECTRUM BUT THERE IS A MASSIVE AMOUNT OF CROSSOVER IN TERMS OF MOTOGP/ WORLDSBK RIDERS FREQUENTLY CHANGING TYRES AND ENTERING THE DIRT. ARE THE TWO CLOSER THAN THEY SEEM? THERE ARE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES IN TERMS OF PHYSICALITY AND MOTORCYCLING PHYSICS BUT WE DECIDED TO QUIZ SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN THE ASPHALT Paddock WHETHER THE MENTAL SIDE OF FINDING 'THE EDGE' OFF-ROAD HAS ANY SIMILARITIES OR RELEVANCE WITH THEIR DAY JOBS...

Asking any MotoGP or Superbike rider about motocross is usually reciprocated with a twinkle of the eye; now the media is asking about something they find fun. The extent of which these athletes engage in their hobby and usually offer full justification as a means of training is normally buried in the unseen, unspoken murk of the paddock. Too many seasons and costly contracts have been blighted by off-road excursions and injury over the decades. For some MX is an essential part of their physical and mental prep but for others the 'irregularities' of off-road is simply not worth the risk. The vast majority however will concede that it's a blast to get on a dirt bike and are only too happy to chat about it.

Motocross exists in a weird void in the road racing world and it is hard to think of another sport where professionals participate in a similar 'alternative cousin' to their specialist skill. It is an activity run at barely a quarter of the speed but draws arguably more physical reserves than a road race, pushes heartrate up to matching levels and beyond and permits refinement of handling technique. Where does it stand in terms of concentration though? Can MotoGP and Superbike champions and race winners pound the muscles between their ears as much as their limbs? We went armed with this thought to the last tests of 2016 and received a few interesting responses...

Bradley Smith, factory KTM MotoGP rider: Physically, mentally and concentration-wise motocross helps a lot. As with anything you need to find a rhythm. If your pace is 1min30 at the track then you try to bang out as many laps in that bracket. You try and hit your lines. I think that road racers don't really change up their lines too much on a motocross track, it tends to be the same ones but you find your rhythm. There is nothing that beats riding a motocross bike and being in-tune, focussed eyes set, arms, legs, core: it is very relevant.

Jonathan Rea, reigning World Superbike Champion and Kawasaki rider: I never rode as a Pro but at a high level in amateur level in the UK. I was a top five guy but when I went road racing it brought a whole new mental aspect to motocross and I started thinking about how to go faster. I am a much faster rider now than when I changed to road racing. It [road racing] gives you the ability to think and study. Our lap-times are tenths of a second apart so the concentration levels are critical. I train with motocross because the track is always changing and it improves my concentration level for Superbike; to make accurate and split-second decisions. I think road racing teaches me more about motocross than the other way. OK, I'm sure as a Pro the guys have to really sit down and analyse what they are doing right and wrong instead of just riding it as fast as they can for thirty minutes but this sport [WorldSBK] is so mentally challenging because there are many aspects: you have to hit the same line every time, being slow in and fast out because the time you gain going into corners is minute compared to winning perfect traction on the way out and that's where motocross differs.

Scott Redding, Pramac Ducati MotoGP rider: I love motocross and I've been riding a lot in Holland. You have hard-pack, a technical track and then sand, which just takes it up to another whole f**king level. It is good for the focus because it is changing all the time.



CONCENTRATION: ROAD RACING & MOTOCROSS

Jack Miller, Marc VDS Honda MotoGP rider: I push every time I get on a motocross bike but I have to warm up because my arms don't work. The first one is like a 10 minute ride; second one is 15; next one's 20; and then 25. I always try to finish-up just by going slow and trying to have a bit of fun. It's great training...but it's also a whole heap of fun at the same time.

Maverick Viñales, factory Yamaha MotoGP rider: It's quite similar. In motocross you need to watch for the good line and keep very concentrated but here the tyres wear off. They are different sports but I try to put them together; when I ride motocross I am trying to 'train' for MotoGP. It is more intense but I really love riding motocross...even if I can only go 70%.



Eugene Laverty: It is such a different discipline in terms of mindset. Here [MotoGP/WorldSBK] things are a lot 'slower', there are fewer variables and you can think about everything: it suits me better. I need to think about things, and motocross is much more instinctive. When the bike is crossed-up then it's down to instinct [to correct it]. There are certain riders who can cross from one to the other and you can see how Marc Marquez rides a motocross bike and then in MotoGP; that guy has some cat-like reflexes and on any two wheels he is going to be fast.

Marc Marquez: It depends on the circuit and of course it depends on the situation. Basically my training at home is motocross and I ride a lot. The concentration level is different because with MotoGP you need to be very, very precise. With motocross you need to be precise as well but you know if you make a mistake you can be out of the line but not lose a lot of time. With MotoGP you need to be very consistent.

Rea: The level of focus depends on the level you race at to be honest. I cannot compare what I do to a Grand Prix motocrosser...maybe they have a completely different opinion. In my point of view to be at the top of Superbike is so mentally challenging because you cannot make mistakes. Mistakes here are potentially fatal. It means a level of focus that takes a lot out of you...to the point now where my concentration level as a day-to-day guy is pretty low! I put all my effort into riding a bike and I'm quite carefree in the rest of my life. Motocross at the very, very top level I guess is the same. It's punishing because you can lose races with a simple brain fart. I ride for fun and not to the level of guys like [factory Kawasaki rider] Clement Desalle but I still do my motos and put the effort in because it improves my concentration level when I ride here.

Franco Morbidelli: I think it is a different kind of concentration. You have to adapt really quickly to the track changes...although this is the kind of concentration you need in Grand Prix sometimes! Like in Malaysia recently because every lap the track was changing and getting drier and drier in different points. So you had to use those points. Moto2, or MotoGP or Moto3, is more about consistency: you have to do something and do it well and do it over and over and over. To maintain that level of performance means a lot of concentration. I'm a road racer so it is easier for me to keep that. For a motocrosser it might be easier in another way.



Valentino Rossi: We have a small motocross track at The Ranch, which is very easy and we go there sometimes but during the season we don't go to a bigger track. Physically and for concentration it is so demanding and this is good for MotoGP but I think it is better to ride on the road and better if you can train on the tarmac.



Laverty: I was strong in motocross as a kid on little bikes but as the bikes and jumps got bigger then I didn't keep that strength. I stopped for about five years and when I got back on a bike I was so much faster because of what road racing had taught me. The same happened to Johnny Rea; he left it and then came back after racing 125s and was suddenly kicking the asses of guys he raced before. You can learn things here; like how important momentum is and piecing all the corners together.

Redding: You don't want to crash and you don't want to get injured so you are even more in the zone. Through the long motos you have to be so concentrated, so when you relate it back to here [MotoGP] you don't have to do it so much and you can focus on the job.



Rea: Would I use the same mentality for a hot lap of Hawkstone Park compared to a Superbike lap? Exactly the same. Although it is hard to define because in motocross you can achieve the same - or a very similar lap-time - in completely different ways. Two Irish guys I grew up with who are both doing well at national level – Martin Barr and Graeme Irwin – can potentially achieve the same lap-time but in their own ways. Martin will be very clinical and make sure he is hitting the perfect line whereas Graeme will be hanging off the rear fender with his elbow hanging down. In road racing you need to be much cleaner. I will go out for practice and I will be saying to myself 'don't make mistakes'. There is a limit to riding and the harder you push the easier it is to make mistakes. Just be clean and usually clean is fast.

Redding: In terms of intensity there is not too much difference mentally but physically they are two different games. MotoGP is quite heavy, slow and being smooth. Motocross is being smooth but erratic at the same time and letting it flow. You attack corners. In MotoGP you are not attacking so much, it is more slow motion and you are not so out-of-breath. It is more general body fatigue. Motocross is especially good in the winter.

Miller: I think your concentration level is similar because you're trying to hit the same line every lap every time on a motocross bike as well as you are on a road bike, but of course on a road bike you're doing it a lot more precise. And with motocross, the track is changing every lap so you have to read the conditions. There are some similarities but there are some big differences.

Laverty: I'm sure the guys at the top-end of motocross slow everything down. The same for us here. You might see us sideways on the TV and it looks fast and crazy but for us it's happening quite slowly. I'd like to go back to motocross at the end of my career to see what I can do because when I left it I was a guy that wasn't very natural. So I'll wait until the end and then take some chances!

FEATURE

"I grew up motocrossing so I understand when bikes get out of shape how to correct my body position or in the air or hitting big kickers or cross-rutting. I grew up with that...but it can be quite dangerous and penalise you hard if you haven't..."



CONCENTRATION: ROAD RACING & MOTOCROSS



Rea: I watch motocross at GP level, amateur or national level and everyone is always keen to get into the corner so fast. There is always that chance that if they cannot get the front wheel into the first rut then there is a second to hit and if you miss that then there is an outside berm you can rail. In road racing we don't have that luxury, you are aiming for the same credit card width of a line every lap because there is a perfect line all the way around the track. Of course the track is constantly changing in motocross and you can see more and more that riders have analysis and spotters that come to races to see what lines are looking better. Here I have Fabien Foret acting as my riding coach and he is out watching but it is more about improving my technique and it is very hard to tell when I am doing something obviously wrong. It is easier for a coach in motocross to say to you 'you're getting this section wrong' or 'this guy is hooking a gear earlier there'. The sports are so different and so far apart but there is a similar mentality. There is a completely different physical input obviously.

Redding: ***“Motocross is really good for fitness, bike control, focus and making last minute decisions...”***

Smith: In so many ways you don't have any downtime in motocross because there is a lot of rider input. It's why fitness is so important and if the fitness isn't there then the lap-time drops off. There is downtime when you jump but in MotoGP you don't have that because you are always braking, accelerating, spinning or changing direction. It is very different from that point of view. MotoGP is not as strenuous because you don't have that same level of drop-off but from a G-force point of view we have a lot of demands on the muscles groups. Motocross has a lot of vibration so that causes a lot of muscle trauma and breakdown if you are riding day-in day-out, MotoGP does not have it as much.

Rea: Unlike motocross guys we don't get to ride a lot. Outside of racing we probably do eight days of testing a year...and then thirteen race weekends. If you're a top MXGP guy then you are going to be riding once, at least twice, a week and during the off-season every other day. We don't have that luxury so a motocross bike is just a way of keeping your brain sharp. I have to touch wood when I say this and I grew up motocrossing so I understand when bikes get out of shape how to correct my body position or in the air or hitting big kickers or cross-rutting. I grew up with that...but it can be quite dangerous and penalise you quite hard if you haven't. I see it as one of the best forms of training for road racing but it is hard to use that model for every road racer because not everyone has grown up with it and the less experience you've had with it then the more risk it brings when you ride as much as I would.

Rossi: I love motocross but I think the tarmac riders have a problem with it because it's very dangerous. I think you have to grow-up with a motocross bike to understand the skills and control of the bike, especially in the air. It can be a good training but too risky and [makes] too many injuries in the past.

Marquez: With MotoGP you can get tired through concentration; with motocross you get more physically tired because the bike is moving all the time.

Miller: You see it at races like Lommel [Belgian MXGP]. You see the guys who push for three laps and then they drop back. And the margin in MotoGP is quite similar on a certain style of track because not everybody can run at the 110% the whole way through the race. You get worn out and you start making mistakes. At Lommel, especially in the 250s [MX2], there was a lot of yo-yoing happening, which I can compare to this. You have guys that push forward to the front but then they start getting tired because they've been riding tight for the first 10 laps, their arms are just hanging off.



Smith: Speed is another thing. If you brake five metres late on a motocross track then you just miss the rut and go to the next one. If you do that in MotoGP then you are off the track or through the gravel. I still think motocross is more demanding. I do believe a background in off-road is helping to produce the best riders.

Morbidelli: If we talk about excitement then there are similarities...but to jump and have a nice whip is much harder!

Redding: Motocross is really good for fitness, really good for bike control and really good for focus and making last minute decisions.

Rea: For me motocross is like a release from reality. My day job is 200mph and it is punishing sometimes because you are paid to go out and win. Riding fast isn't the fun part; it's achieving results. So for motocross when you can put your own bike in the van and go out to the practice track without a crew chief, three mechanics, a tyre guy, telemetry guy and someone to even start your bike then it is like a release. You go there, get kitted up, feel good and hit the track. I feel free because it is not a job. I imagine it would be punishing if it was. I don't have to go fast and I can just enjoy it. That feeling of both wheels off the ground and in the air – like your flying – is really nice. There is no other sport that gives me that. The buzz from road racing comes in a completely different way. It is not any less or more. I don't have many pictures of me in the house riding a superbike but there is a picture of me in the office wheel-tapping through sand dunes in the middle of rushes and it was one of these photos that I asked my wife to get framed because it reminds me of putting in hard work. Riding motocross is hard work, and it reminds me of that day when I was drained and empty and I went out and did it and feels cool.

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WHO WILL REIGN IN SPAIN...?

By Adam Wheeler

MXGP should lollop out of hibernation like a sleepy bear in the next couple of weeks but it won't take long for the scene to stretch away the slumber and hurry off into a 'forest' of activity. The invention of social media channels and those pertinent to images and videos in the last five years means its easy to keep track of where proactive riders are currently riding and testing and probably glad to have passed through the hardest of the base training months. January and February are eventful times for a Grand Prix participant.

A couple of limb-shakeouts at International races (or early domestic series like the Italian three-rounder) and last set-up tests will occur in just a six-week period before crates and freight have to depart to Doha for the first Grand Prix of nineteen. Add in photoshoots, presentations and a few sponsor obligations with a fair share of traveling and it all creeps up very quickly. A twitter post from MXGP just last week revealed there were only 50 days until the new season begins in the Qatari night air; it's an unusually frantic stint of the year and only WorldSBK faces a similar rush with their opening dash happening in Australian Eastern Time Zone on the same weekend as MX.

High profile fixtures in Sardinia, France and the UK will be the first chance to see 2017 colours, feeling and fitness but it is curious to note the Red Sands facility in eastern Spain also entering the agenda. Factory riders from Husqvarna, Suzuki, Kawasaki and Yamaha will be on the gate (Paulin, Nagl, Tonus, Simpson, Seewer, Tixier and co) and set to compete at the remodelled

track – by former Grand Prix track designer Greg Atkins no less – on January 21-22.

There was talk in the summer of 2016 that the eager Red Sands organisers - the Intur Sports group once a personal sponsor of Stefan Everts and the factory Yamaha team - were angling for an event along the lines of a Grand Prix 'O'; almost like a special test or 'official' MXGP pre-season gathering. The idea fell away when several factories could not commit (KTM have their testing schedule in Sardinia, as per every year...indeed works MX2 rider Jorge Prado is personally backed by Red Sands and cannot participate in the upcoming race).

The meeting is going ahead and with considerable investment in the riding facilities just outside of Castellon, several hours south of Barcelona. The fact that the site boasts two GP-spec layouts and a sand course means that Red Sands are charging after Grand Prix standard provisions. With the charismatic (but frankly unsuitable) Talavera de la Reina dropping away from the MXGP roster for 2017 after a year of rumours that the event was unstable, Red Sands are putting themselves in the best position to at least capture the attention of Youthstream, the FIM and an enthusiastic Spanish fan base excited by Prado that could well be enticed by the Intur Sports range of hotels and amenities that make their leisure set-up popular homes to football teams and professional athletes through the year.

The paddock space and construction apparently needs refinement to cater for the full race haulage the factory efforts like to bring and 2017 will



be the first attempt at creation of a bona fide International meeting that could grow in fame and prestige as the Starcross at Mantova in Italy. It would certainly be a low-cost way to gather leading MXGP names and a prospective fan attendance...and could lead to reestablishment of the official MXGP pre-season scheme or even a round of the series itself. Red Sands and the Castellon area is well known to Grand Prix regulars as a viable winter training option. It seems things are now becoming a bit more formal, and someone is prepared to capitalise on the presence of some of the sports leading names in the zone at this time of year.

Like the hundreds laps that will soon be run by the MotoGP elite once January clicks into February there is only so much an observer can take from non-championship appearances; there are simply too many vital GPs, starts and motos ahead to contemplate any degree of risk. Don't underestimate the value of these pre-season fixtures though as the last phase of race-dialling; Qatar comes too quickly not to seize these changes to wring a dirt bike just a little bit harder.





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SCOTT SPORTS

Sad news for Scott Sports with Justin Barcia unable to make the line at Anaheim with a wrist injury and the former 250SX champion's bid to create an impact on the 450 faced another dent after thumb and hip problems in the last two years. Barcia would have been wearing the latest version of the impressive Prospect goggle that has undergone a few tweaks for fit and improved function since its launch last summer but is undoubtedly one of the references for the goggle market thanks to the vast lens size (perimeter adjustment, revised frame curvature) and solid locking system. Three layer foam, 50mm WFS roll-off, anti-fog lens and removable nose guard only increase the specs. Scott were still able to count on presence from the likes of Trey Canard and the Monster Energy Pro Circuit Kawasaki troupe.

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FEATURE

A CHAT WITH... JACK MILLER

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by CormacGP

**RIDING, EXPECTATIONS,
'THAT' WIN AND & MORE WITH
AUSTRALIA'S TOP MotoGP HOPE**



JACK MILLER



It has taken a while to catch up with Jack Miller. We met the Australian – then sporting a frankly ridiculous red haircut at Valencia in 2013 – and then made a couple of interviews in subsequent years; one of which involved him abusing a KTM enduro bike around the motocross track adjacent to the Montmelo Grand Prix circuit in Barcelona. Moto3 glory, flamey MotoGP baptisms, dark injury times with a snapped right leg due to an MX incident in the first days of 2016, to insane ‘highs’ with victory at Assen last summer; Miller has kept busy and somehow kept his sense of humour and character intact as he threads his way through the rougher waters the sport has to offer.

In a sense Jack has either been ‘there’ – trophies and top ten finishes on the Marc VDS RCV and as their top representative in MotoGP – or ‘nowhere’ due to more injury misery with hand and back problems in the heart of the 2016 campaign. Valencia last November was an apt time to finally sit down and drink one of the bizarre black bottled waters inside the VDS hospitality and apply a gauge on what life has been like for the 21 year old [soon to be 22 this month].

Despite his poor luck with the discipline motocross seemed like a natural place to start with the Australian...

Been riding much recently?

Motocross? First time, last week back on a motocross bike since I fucked my hand up but it was good. In the middle of the season, after Assen, I did a heap of days in Belgium and Holland as well. I stayed there for about two weeks after.

Where were you?

Lommel. In Belgium, Lommel was the only one I did but then a heap in Holland. One of them was really good. I was with Toby [Price] and Sam [Sunderland]. It was good.

Were you riding Lommel or just trying to get around it?!

[smiles] No, I was riding. I was going alright. Wasn't too bad. But then the other day I came back to Spain, where I hadn't ridden a bike for a while and I still had the half-scoop on, so it was a bit slippery on the hard pack! So I just poked around.

When's the last time you raced?

I would have had to be 13 or 12.

Not even an amateur thing since then?

Nothing, no, because I'm never anywhere where I can really race. I'm always moving around. I would really like to do a race, for sure. One of my best friends died on a motocross bike in 2011 and we do an event for him every year at the local track, which a lot of fast guys attend. Last year I put 2,000 in prize money down for a 20 minute open class moto at the end and the winner takes everything. So we get a few fast guys come to that. That's probably the last race I did. I would like to do that again but the problem is it's in January when we're already trying to get ready.

When you had your accident and injury how did you find the attitude to it here? I can imagine people rolling their eyes and thinking 'not motocross again...'

They were pretty good about it to be honest. Everyone understood why we were there. I was training, you know, for the upcoming season and it was just an innocent mistake. I didn't crash, didn't do anything stupid; just somebody made me shut off the gas on the ramp. It's just one of those things that can happen but everyone was pretty cool about it, the team and even the management side of things as well.

JACK MILLER





I asked Tyla Rattray once “how many near misses would you say you had in a moto?” and he replied “2 or 3...” I said, “Every moto?” and he said “No, in a lap.” Anything near the same for you in MotoGP?

Probably when you're on the limit, about the same, two or three a lap. It's hectic. You're coming through, you've got your elbow in the ground, you're pulling the thing around. Especially when you're pushing to try and close a gap or something like that, that's when you really start getting loose. A lot more with these Michelin tyres than it was with Bridgestone, that's for sure.

With the motocross accident you must have known at some point that it was going to be pretty bad...

Yeah, someone sort of swapped-out on ramp and I was barely staying on the 250 because I had to balance the hell out of it just to make the distance. So you're coming at it with quite a bit of height. The ramp was made on the side of a hill but then it levelled out on top and I was jumping the lot. Halfway up the ramp I had to roll it back off basically, and I had to commit to it; I had to go to back on gas. Just the impact of that just exploded my leg.

I remember seeing you limping around in Qatar, it was almost the worse situation you could be in...

I'm still not perfect now. All the cartilage exploded and is gone. The bone as well isn't in the best condition because it was an impact fracture. It wasn't like a normal break. It was basically like you've got two knuckles on the bottom of your leg and I broke them. This piece blew off here, that piece blew off there and it blew off the centre as well. So all the cartilage around the bone clicks and crackles like hell. You wouldn't believe it. That's why I've been doing a lot of cycling this year, as opposed to any running or anything like that because I just can't.

On a more positive note, is it not too much of an exaggeration to say that Assen was a bit of a life-changing moment?

No, it's not an exaggeration to say. I think it's pretty spot-on. It definitely changed my life. I think it just put a lot more fuel in my fire. It made me even hungrier than I was.. We've had some up and downs, especially breaking my back and everything like that. Austria wasn't easy and then it wasn't so much the back [injury] but when I broke my hand—I don't know if you can still see it but there is a lump there. It's still not right. That was giving me the most grief and that brought me down again. But then the last two races, I started building up on it again. So I'm reasonably happy at the moment.

Does a win like that feel long way away or can you still feed off of it?

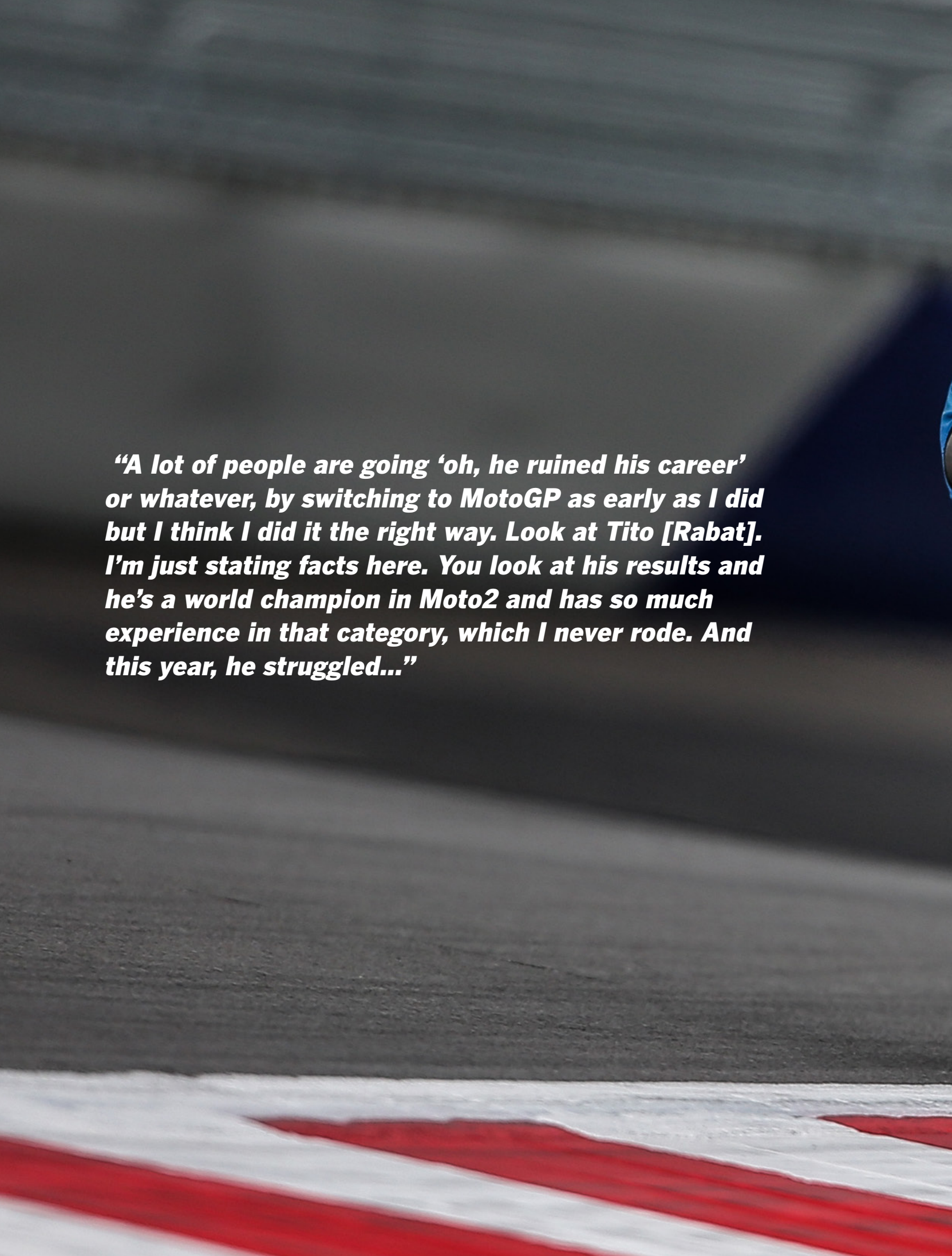
It is a long way away. It was a long time ago. But it's always good to remember. Keep it in the back of your mind and try to remember it in the low moments. I've been in much worse positions than I am now. I'm pretty happy with my position, I love being in this team, like the group I'm working with. I haven't got too much to complain about really.

You had success almost on a weekly basis in Moto3. Did the Assen feel more intense?

Moto3 was good because we were the front-runners, we were 'the man' to beat there. But that was only for one year. The rest of the time I was there, I was just always trying to build-up to be that guy and now we're doing the same thing here.

Do you think you were a bit harshly done-by with your first year in this class? There was some criticism that you approached MotoGP in the wrong way. Did you think: “cut me some slack...”

Yeah, for sure. The thing I like to put it down to is results. The first year in the championship I beat the 2006 world champion on the exactly same bike. And we had problems as well—a



“A lot of people are going ‘oh, he ruined his career’ or whatever, by switching to MotoGP as early as I did but I think I did it the right way. Look at Tito [Rabat]. I’m just stating facts here. You look at his results and he’s a world champion in Moto2 and has so much experience in that category, which I never rode. And this year, he struggled...”

JACK MILLER



couple times when we should have scored a lot more points than we did because of the bike breaking down. That happened last year and then this year, again, we've constantly been pushing to try to be the top satellite at Honda. Cal's [Crutchlow] come on pretty strong in the last part of the year but we also haven't had parts since my crew chief announced that he's leaving to go to Ducati. So we haven't had much information on that side because why would you give it to somebody who is leaving? I can completely understand from Honda's point of view.

What about dealing with the spotlight of being in the premier class and having these vast ups and downs? It seems you can bounce from being written about to being written-off so quickly...

Definitely. Like you say, a lot of people are going, "oh, he ruined his career," or whatever, by switching to MotoGP as early as I did but I think I did it the right way. Look at Tito [Rabat]. I'm just stating facts here. You look at his results and he's a world champion in Moto2 and has so much experience in that category, which I never rode. And this year, he's struggled and still is struggling. It will be interesting to see how Jonas [Folger] and those guys go when they come up with Tech3 because those bikes are working quite well at this point in time. I believe I'm going about it the right way. I came into the championship on a bike that was uncompetitive and underpowered. Then this year for Marc to win the championship was a miracle because the bike was not how it should be, especially at the start of the season. So he's been fortunate with the problems that Yamaha has had. And I think next year will be a different story. My fingers are crossed because I'm on the Honda next year but we'll keep working, we'll see where we are in Qatar next year.

Was it an eye opener for you coming here and joining HRC and this team and moving from KTM and all that attention in Moto3? Did you think 'why is everyone so obsessed with what's going on with me?'

Not really. I feel I've proved myself, because in Moto3 I had one year on a complete and utter shit-box the first year I came to the world championship in 2012. I was on a bike that I could have gone to the shop for. Literally, my father and I could have bought the bike from the shop because it was a standard Honda that their Asia Talent Cup is using now—that same spec. And then as soon as we got on a bike that turned and handled ell, we went good with the FTR. It was completely underpowered but we fought for podiums many races and we were 'there'. And then as soon as I got on a bike with power, I won the first two races. I should have won the third one as well. Of course, I learned a lot in the first two years I think, and that built me to become the rider that I was in 2014 and I think it's the same thing here. You start from the bottom, you get taken right back to the gutter but it makes you a tougher rider, I think, in the future.



We spoke when you were at KTM and you had Aki [Ajo], Joan [Olive] and a tight group around you. Do you still have that support structure in place?

I still work with Aki. He's still my manager. He comes in the box for my sessions and is always there telling me what he thinks, his take

on how he believes I'm riding on that day, in that point in time or whatever. But I've got a great relationship with everyone here and everybody tries to help as much as they can. You take however much you need...

So you've not looked around and tried to use somebody else to gain a couple of extra tenths or something like that?

Of course you always listen to what people say, even if they say it on TV like ex-riders or fellow riders. You're always listening to what they see and taking it in. You're always looking for ways to go faster. If you don't listen to what they say, you're an idiot.

People might easily forget as well how young you are. Is it a case of playing a waiting game in this class? You've got riders who are 28, 29, 30—the way this sport moves, can you afford to be patient?

Not really. Because we're at the pinnacle now and we've got to try and stay at the pinnacle. You don't want to fall off the side, but if you do, you've got to get back up. It goes up like that [angles hand sharply] then it goes down like that. If you want to try to come back, it's hard. You're always working your ass off to try and stay at the top of the class. Like you say, there's so many people around looking for their opportunity, whether it be Moto2, or Superbikes, or anything. So many people want to be in MotoGP, so you've always got to be working your ass off and get the best that you can. But I think in the next three or four years a lot of seats will open up because I think there will be a lot of guys who will retire soon. Dani [Pedrosa], Jorge [Lorenzo], Cal, the list goes on. There are so many riders there that are quite old. But if you look at Cal, it seems like he's getting better with age and you never know when he'll go. It will be interesting. We're just waiting for some seats to free up. Dani's got another two years. I'm fortunate enough to be in the position I am now with the team I'm in. I'm enjoying it so much and I think it's definitely one of the best satellite teams there is in the paddock. I'm really lucky.



WILD SIDE...

By David Emmett

2017 has started. We have had one public test at Valencia, and a semi-public test with some of the factories at Jerez, and a private one in Sepang. We have only the vaguest idea of what will happen in 2017, and whatever we think we know is likely to be wrong.

No better time to make wildly inappropriate predictions based on half-baked ideas extrapolated from the sparsest of data points. So here are some of the things I predict will happen in the 2017 MotoGP season:

There will fewer winners, but closer racing...

A lot of factors conspired to allow nine different riders to win races in 2016. New tyres, new electronics, the strongest field in a decade. And then of course there was the weather, the lingering after effects of El Niño making for conditions that were hotter, colder, and much, much wetter than normal. It was a perfect storm (literally so, at a couple of races) from which surprise winners could emerge.

Things will be much more settled in 2017. Michelin will have a year's worth of data from a full field of MotoGP bikes at every track with which to build new tyres. That means the tyres won't change so much between races, which means in turn that teams will have a much better chance at working methodically towards a strong base set up throughout the season. The factories have a much better grasp of the electronics than they did in 2016, and much of their knowledge will have been passed down to the satellite teams. El Niño, the Christmas Child, is long gone, and the weather in Europe should be a little less unpredictable, and a little closer to what passes for normal.

The wildcard factors that threw up so many winners may have gone, but there will still be plenty of riders capable of winning. Marc Márquez, Dani Pedrosa, and Valentino Rossi can all be expected to take races (and more), just as they have done nearly every year they have been in MotoGP. The

Ducati is good enough for Jorge Lorenzo to triumph. Maverick Viñales is likely as good as we all thought, and he too will win races. And if and when any of the regulars fail, there are plenty capable of taking their place. Andrea Dovizioso is good enough on his day, as is Andrea Iannone. Cal Crutchlow showed just how good he can be several times last year, and there's no reason to think he won't do the same again. We won't have nine winners in 2017, but there is every reason to expect we will see six.

Honda won't quite get it right again ...

At the end of every season since 2013, Honda have said their main objective is to make the RC213V easier to ride. And every year, Honda riders will privately admit that the bike has become harder, not easier the following season.

Some of this is because they have also made some major changes to the engine. In 2015, they changed the engine to give it more torque, but also tried to give it more top end. In 2016, they reversed the crank direction, to try to make the bike easier to turn. And for 2017, HRC have changed the ignition spacing, dropping the traditional screamer configuration to turn it into a big bang. All of these changes were aimed at making the engine more docile. Yet they rarely seemed to work early the subsequent season.

The reception the riders gave to the big bang firing order RC213V was familiar. After the initial outing at Valencia, Honda cancelled the planned private test at Jerez. Officially, this was because they had run through their full testing programme at Valencia. Reading between the lines of Marc Márquez' and Dani Pedrosa's statements, they were angry that the new engine still needed so much work before it will be ready to race. HRC are not where they need to be. But the good news is that they have found this out at Valencia, and not at the Sepang test at the end of January, by which time it would have been too late.



...But Marc Márquez will be champion anyway

Honda may get their engine not quite right each time they make a change, but the amount by which they get it wrong diminishes every year. The RC213V won't be quite right at Qatar, but it will be good enough. By the time MotoGP gets to the Barcelona test, HRC's brilliant engineers will have an electronics upgrade and a few magic parts to take the remaining rough edges off the bike. It will be a much more competitive machine than at the start of the 2016 season.

What will worry Marc Márquez' rivals is the maturity he displayed in 2016. He didn't throw away a probable podium in pursuit of a possible victory. He settled for third (or worse), because he understood that winning a title was better than winning the occasional race. Márquez will only get better in 2017, and the combination of another year of experience and a better Honda will be good enough to take the title.

Jorge Lorenzo will win at Qatar. And other races too...

It is fair to say that Jorge Lorenzo is highly motivated by his move to Ducati. He has something to prove to the world, and to Yamaha, and most especially, to his former teammate Valentino Rossi. What better way to do that than equal Valentino Rossi's record of winning back-to-back races on different bikes? In 2003, Valentino Rossi clinched his last race on the Honda at Valencia, then followed it up with a legendary victory at Welkom in South Africa aboard the Yamaha in 2004. Lorenzo won his last race on the Yamaha at Valencia, and will be going all out to claim the first of 2017 at Qatar on board the Ducati.

Can he do it? The Ducati is good enough, as two victories in 2016 showed. The GP17 should be even better than the GP16, and Lorenzo was quick enough on the GP16 at Valencia. Michelin's tyre allocation should be a lot more settled in 2017, making Lorenzo's job clearer. He has one of the

best crew chiefs in the world in Cristian Gabarrini, and will have assistance from former double world champion Casey Stoner. Qatar is one of Lorenzo's strongest tracks, and he won there last year. The omens are good for his first outing on the Ducati.


Qatar will not be the only GP he wins. The Ducati Desmosedici is not yet perfectly suited to Lorenzo's style, nor vice versa. But there will be enough tracks where Lorenzo can use the corner speed the Ducati has to offer, and Gigi Dall'Igna has all year to play with the chassis to give Lorenzo what he needs. At tracks like Mugello, the Red Bull Ring, Phillip Island, and maybe Sepang, Lorenzo should be capable of winning. It's probably a year too early for Lorenzo to make a proper run at the title, but he will surprise more than a few fans.

Johann Zarco will get a podium

2017 sees an interesting crop of rookies enter MotoGP. Johann Zarco and Jonas Folger at Tech 3, Alex Rins at Suzuki, Sam Lowes at Aprilia. All four have won races in the support classes, and Zarco and Lowes are world champions. There is plenty to get excited about.

The best of the bunch, however, is Zarco. The Frenchman has all the tools to succeed in MotoGP: he is exceptionally smooth, has the focus and patience needed to learn, and his style will suit the Yamaha more than other bikes. His modesty – a strange trait for a world champion – will relieve any pressure he feels. He has an outstanding crew chief in Guy Coulon, one whose temperament should suit his own. Zarco was quick enough at Valencia, but more importantly, he made fast progress. He was even better at Sepang, if rumour is to be believed.

At one race in 2017, things will fall Zarco's way. When they do, he will end up on the podium.



AFTER THE TALK AND THE TESTS THE ASHES HAVE FIRMLY SETTLED ON THE LORENZO-DUCATI TRANSFER THAT WILL BE THE BIGGEST SHAKER IN MOTOGP FOR 2017. AMONG THE REMNANTS OF THE 2015 CHAMPION'S MOVE AWAY FROM YAMAHA AFTER ALMOST TEN YEARS OF A POWERFUL ASSOCIATION IS CATALAN **RAMON FORCADA**; THE CREW CHIEF AND TECHNICAL FORCE BEHIND THE OFTEN PEERLESS LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE BY '99'. TAMMY GORALI ASKED YAMAHA FOR SOME TIME WITH THE 59 YEAR OLD TECHNICIAN TO TALK ABOUT HIS WORK AND THE FORMER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MERCURIAL COUNTRYMAN – NOW TRANSPLANTED TO ANOTHER SPANIARD IN THE FORM OF MAVERICK VIÑALES...

By Tammy Goral
Photos by Yamaha Racing.com

THE ARCHITECT?

MOTOGP, YAMAHA, LORENZO & MORE: RAMON FORCADA



Ramon Forcada has over than 20 years of experience in the MotoGP paddock, nine of them with three times world champion Jorge Lorenzo, who just ended his partnership with both Yamaha and most of his team, leaving his crew chief behind. Forcada has worked at the top and with some of the cream of the sport for decades and his last rider is known for his search for perfection and lofty demands both from himself but also from his bike and crew. From the outside looking into the box it doesn't always seem like sunshine and rainbows, so is this the reason the Spanish crew chief decided to stick with Yamaha? We acquired some time with Forcada at Valencia to find out...

How does a Grand Prix weekend normally begin and then run for you?

Basically before the GP we start to make the base setting; we use all the information and data from the previous rounds, previous races at the specific track. Usually we start with two different settings, one for each bike because of the tyres and the track conditions could be changing. Once we begin we can lean toward the one setting that works the best and after the first session is finished the rider could share with us which one is better for him and what he needs; which are the good and bad points of each setting and especially what we need to improve to be fast. A decision will follow on what to do with the bike for the next session and we start to prepare and work to come up with the best compromise for the rider. We do not keep all the data we collect to ourselves but pass it on to the Japanese engineers, the suspension engineers, the tyre engineers so we can all put together our ideas and skills to improve the bike for the next races and for the next development generation of the Yamaha; this is crucial information for both the immediate and future improvements.

There were a lot of changes this season mainly the tyre manufacturer and ECU; how much of a gap of knowledge was there and difference from last season?

The tyres of course are very important. This season they did not always have the same character. When we held the first tests with them, during the 2015 season, we found that the rear tyre was good but the front wasn't. They did improve it a lot as they changed the casing and profile; they changed everything. It caused many changes to the bike, mainly with the weight balance cause at the beginning we needed to help the front tyre and get it to work and then get the balance between the front and the rear; that was a big task and it was a very important change. In regards to the ECU you can say it is now more basic than in the past. We had last year's information but it was impossible to do the same [settings] but we know which way to follow in general and we tried to do as close as possible to how we had it in the past.

Honda said that they started the season with 70% understanding of the ECU and at the end of the season they are standing at about 85%. How do you see your progress?

Well, I don't know exactly in terms of percentages and where we are but for sure we are improving. We are working on the electronics all year but I think it is a difficult case to fully understand as it is difficult to figure out how to improve. We need to understand how to profit from the Magneti Marelli software, so we can learn how to use it better but we cannot change the management of the bike. It is complicated as we can never arrive to a 100% but now we know the margin we have to play with. All of course will depend on the tyres and if they spin alot and if there is good grip or not. Same for the engine braking; if the tyre has good grip with not so strong engine brak-



ing we could play differently with the weight. If it is not so good we need to load the front and might lose rear contact and might struggle more. So it all goes to the tyres and how they work in order to know which way to go with the electronics.

Your rider didn't really click with the Michelins; how much harder has it been this season to work with him cause of that?

The issue was that the tyre was not the same every time. Michelin changed the casing and the tyre character for every race and it created a big problem. Jorge has a riding style where he needs the edge grip as he carries high corner speed and he needs a lot of confidence when entering the corner. When he doesn't have that confidence it means he cannot ride the bike in his style, as he needs to stop it every time he enters a corner and he needs to also pick the bike up and that's difficult for

him. When the tyres are always the same, he can manage and learn to use them but when every race it's not only adapting the setting but the rider has to adapt his riding style then it's difficult. He said that he had to change his riding style this season, as he had no confidence on the grip and no confidence in corner entry or to open the throttle and it was very difficult for him.

So how did this difficulty affect the way you worked in the box? From the outside it seemed very tense at times...

When the results are not coming the rider - who is used to winning is not happy - it's normal. Everybody wants to win, everybody wants to do their maximum and when the wins are not coming of course it creates tension but not with us but with the situation. Every one of us want to work and get a good result but we were unable. A rider always wants a perfect

bike and when they cannot get it, it creates tension, if we won all the races, everything would have been rainbows.

So did it cause personal tension also?

Not at all, it only looks like that. The moments when we are all in the process and he wanted something we could not give him, mainly cause of all the changes, it was tense. But it was only during the work, not afterwards. Same as it was impossible for us to ask the rider to change his riding style; it was impossible for the rider to ask us to provide something we couldn't.

Did you expect Lorenzo to have so many difficulties?

At the beginning no...but when they started to change the tyres, I knew it would be a bit difficult.

How did the 'triangle' work with you, the rider and Wilco Zeelenberg?

Wilco doesn't really have an effect on the technical side, he was more an advisor for the rider. He'd go out to the track, spot what the rider is doing, what happens to the bike, what is the difference between the two bikes and provide more information to the rider and give him more help. Sometimes it actually puts the rider in a strange situation because other riders like Marquez, Valentino or Pedrosa are doing something out there but it does not mean that Jorge can do the same. For example in Sepang they changed the camber in the last corner and every rider took a different line with no big difference in the times and it was difficult to say which was the correct one. It was clear that for the Hondas, for example, it was easiest to break on the straight, flick, pick up the bike and go, but this kind of riding for Jorge is difficult. Even if Wilco explains "this guy is doing so and so..." it does not mean that this is how it would go.

You have decided to stay in Yamaha and not follow the rider to Ducati; it's a unique decision these days...

Yes.

You've said that if you were 20 years younger you would have made the change...

Correct, because then I would have had more time to go on an 'adventure'. If I were younger, it would have been easier. For me Yamaha is a very good team and I like to be a part of it and now to move to another manufacturer is a big deal. Do not forget that to change between Japanese factories it's a change but not a big one. However in the case of Ducati, I had never worked with them in the past and by just looking at them from the outside it seems that the 'rider working system' is different and the way of working with the factories and development engineers is different, so to place myself in a situation where so many things change and I am not sure which system is better for me: it was a bit too much.

How big a deal is it for the mechanics to change manufacturers? Yes it's a bike but it isn't like a different language...

Yes it's still a bike, one engine, one suspension, one chassis, so that's not the problem. The biggest problem is the working style as each factory has its own philosophy, so for me without knowing if Ducati is worse or better as I am 59 years old, it's not a necessary change. If, for example, I had problems with Yamaha and wasn't happy or I didn't like the rider who replaced Jorge or that rider preferred somebody else working with him, I might have considered it. But as it is, I am happy here and the rider [Maverick Vinales] is young with great potential and is interested in working together with me, so there was no reason to change.

I've heard that the first time you meet a rider it's like a 'first date'...

In a way it is. First you need to create your working system, your own language; for different riders the same word has different meaning. I have worked in the past with so many: Stoner, Pedrosa, Criville, Barros, Checa, Aspar, Puig, Kocinski and every time we had to create our own dictionary. Personally, I need to understand what the rider needs to be fast, one might need good braking to be fast and



LORENZO ON FORCADA

“Like any married couple, you can feel some-time love but also hate because we both have very strong character, it’s like having two ‘Jorge Lorenzos’ or two ‘Ramon Forcadas’ working together, at times, it could be very complicated. We never forgot that this is a sport and our job and as professionals we found a way to live together even though it was not easy and we achieved amazing things in the last nine years. On the technical level, for sure will miss his suspension expertise, he is one of the best if not the best one.”

FEATURE



doesn't care so much for the acceleration and if its stepping out or spinning. And another might brake early, use corner speed and acceleration. Our first need is to understand the style to help him to be fast.

How long is the process to get to know a rider?

You never know a rider completely. Now with Jorge after nine seasons we are still learning from each other. Every time something external changes, like the tyres, ECU, weight or winglets you need to get to know each other again so we still had to change the working style with every new problem and challenge we faced.

What do you think you learned from Lorenzo after all these years?

Same as I did with every rider, I learned how to give him a good bike that he can ride and he learned how to ride the bike that we were able to give to him.

How would you describe the relationship between a Crew Chief and a rider?

It's like a couple; each one needs the other to be complete. You can prepare a good bike but without the rider it can stay in the garage. If you have a very good rider but the bike doesn't work, you will never win. In the end we need to be together or it doesn't work. We have different jobs but both are important. Both sides try to make the other one better.

Did you already started to look at Viñales and his riding?

Yes, but it's difficult as he was riding on a different bike. What I am interested in is how Maverick is able to ride the Yamaha not how he was able to ride the Suzuki. Maybe the Suzuki allowed him to ride the bike in a certain way or maybe the Yamaha will give him the extra he needs to be fast, so until he tries the bike and rides it a little, we cannot say. We need to see what comes out when you mix the bike and the rider. It's not like mathematics. Not always does the best rider on the best bike give you the best outcome.

You helped many riders with their first steps in the premier class, Viñales has two years of experience now so what's easier?

When a rider just comes up to the big bikes they feel immediately that it is very powerful... then they complain there is not enough power! In the case of Viñales [and his experience] its good for the company as we can understand quicker what he needs and how to solve problems he had with the other manufacturer. The issue is always the same no matter if they come from another team, class or championship: it's to understand what they need. What made you stay in the team for Viñales? You need to have a good feeling. If a rider gives you bad one, you better not stay around. I waited before making my decision to know which rider Yamaha had signed, I also notified Ducati at the same time. Once he signed, I confirmed that I would stay.

When we look at the pit box we seem to forget that there are often two sides and two camps involved. How did you see that rivalry between Lorenzo and Valentino? How difficult was it?

It is difficult, mainly as we had two good riders so they clash. When the riders are on two different levels, it is smoother, as there is clearly a number 1 and a number 2 and the 2nd never really pushes the top rider. In our case we had two top riders so they wanted to beat their teammate but we, the mechanics had to stay one team. We are professional. Even in the worse moment in the relationship between the riders, if the other side of the box needed a hand we gave it, same as when we needed it. The riders actually did not always know this but it's not necessary they know...we are all Yamaha employees.

What is your favorite memory from the last nine seasons with Jorge?

Mainly the first championship, it was the first.

And what will you miss about having Jorge in your corner?

Many things. Yes we are getting a new fast rider but after nine years working together we didn't have to talk much to communicate. All riders want to win every race and every session but what is special about him is that he was upset even if he finished second in a session that didn't really mean anything. Even after winning a race he always found a problem with the bike and something to improve. He always pushed us to improve while he himself, never gave up. I appreciate that attitude. Thanks to that he pushed our team to move forward.

“All riders want to win every race and every session but what is special about Jorge is that he was upset even if he finished second in a session that didn't really mean anything. Even after winning a race he always found a problem with the bike and something to improve...”

Do you sometimes get anxious to see your rider go out on the track?

Always. The perfect bike doesn't exist, we can never allow ourselves to believe we did a perfect job because if we did then we would finish the race with a 50 second gap. The bike doesn't have a limit on the speed or on the lap time so every season we keep on improving and we will never stop to improve. Sometimes we go backwards because of changes or because the rider has some problems, so anything can happen but our goal is always to improve and we need to work together.

SIX BATTLES TO LOOK FOR IN '17...

By Neil Morrison

A New Year and another new season almost upon us. With it come a plethora of MotoGP subplots to keep us revelling in excitement until the lights go out on March 17th. What better time to ponder over several key battles that possess the potential to ignite the 68th running of the premier class?

Viñales versus Rossi

Until now, the pair has shared a cordial relationship that, at times during 2016, bordered on friendly. Both found benefit in regularly lapping on track together during qualifying, while Viñales regularly spoke of learning from Rossi's eternal talents as the prime motivator behind his defection from Suzuki. In return, Rossi regularly talked up the 21-year old's potential, offering a playful "I'm a little worried for next year" on more than one occasion. But that came before the Valencia test, where the young Catalan ended both days fastest overall. "Someone a bit older would have been better, like Pedrosa," Rossi joked of the new presence in his garage during an interview on Italian radio station DeeJay Chiama Italia in November. Entering quite possibly the final two years of his racing career, Rossi knows starting well and ahead of Viñales will be crucial in his bid for that tenth title. His body language and eagerness to get out on track on Tuesday at Valencia showed he is all-too-aware of the challenge ahead. And if it ever escapes him he has best mate Uccio Salucci to remind him. "Do not trust anyone who says they have your poster in their bedroom," Salucci told Spanish paper Marca in October.

Lorenzo's arrival into the Yamaha fold was one factor that inspired Rossi to arguably his two finest seasons of riding. It's not likely that Viñales will shy away from this contest either. "Inside he will not sleep until he is in front of Valentino all the time," says ex-team boss Sito Pons. It promises to be a battle to savour.

Marquez versus Viñales (and Rossi)

In the cramped, shaded press room at Misano a photo had found its way into the hands of a member of the Spanish press. Less than a week on from Viñales' debut MotoGP triumph, the image showing two kids – aged no more than seven and nine – was not just a snapshot of MotoGP's present, it also readily pointed to its future. That the picture was of Marquez and Viñales after a Catalan mini-bike race was not much of a surprise. That it was Viñales enjoying victory on top of the podium with Marc looking somewhat bemused below was. And, according to both camps, Viñales winning at this tender age was no freak occurrence.

An age difference of two years kept the pair separated until 2015. Now, two years on, the two Catalans will face-off with roughly the same equipment for the first time since childhood races more than 15 years ago. And Marquez is all-too-aware of his young rival's talents. "I knew he could win here," said the five-time champ after Silverstone. "[Maverick] warned us on Thursday he was confident." That was telling. For Marquez has been keeping a very close eye on what Viñales says, be it on a Thursday or after a race – surely the highest compliment. After all just how many men can boast of beating Marquez more than on occasion at any-time in the Repsol man's career? The knowledge that he has a new rival to consider showed when Marquez got in a sly dig at the Superprestigio in December. "Maybe the normal thing after winning MotoGP would be to go to the Maldives," said the five-time champ, referencing Maverick's recent holiday. "But I have a big passion for racing." Marquez's mutual disdain for Rossi will continue. With Ducati's championship pedigree not yet proven, Marquez will surely view the Movistar Yamaha team-mates as the men to beat.

Pedrosa versus Crutchlow

Unlike the above, little to no animosity exists between Dani Pedrosa and Cal Crutchlow, other than that the normal racer's desire to swat aside anyone



who rides for your fellow manufacturer. Granted that Marquez will lead HRC's charge toward a possible fourth premier class championship, LCR Honda's Crutchlow will be thinking that outscoring Repsol's number two is a realistic goal. After all, he did so in all-but-two races in 2016's second half. Two wins and other notable performances firmly established the Englishman as the class' top satellite rider. Further improvements with Michelin's 17-inch front tyre are likely to aid his quest too.

But - coming off what was unquestionably the anus horribilis of his 16-year GP career - write Pedrosa off at your peril. Likely to be reinvigorated by new crew chief Giacomo Guidotti, a more user-friendly RC213V engine and a clean bill of health, the Spaniard still has the measure of anyone on his day. And that included Valentino Rossi, in Italy. And is it perhaps naïve to think this could only be a two-way fight? Jack Miller's testing performance in Valencia showed that, given the right backing, he too could challenge Crutchlow and Pedrosa on occasion.

Iannone versus Dovizioso

The mutual disliking that existed between the two Andreas - Dovizioso and Iannone - was all-too-apparent through 2016, be it in the wake of that calamitous collision in Argentina, or Dovizioso's utter dismay at losing out to his team-mate in Austria. Dovizioso's comments to Italian sport daily Gazzetta dello Sport in December made his feelings on the matter clear. "On the one hand, he [Iannone] served as a stimulus for me since he is a very fast rider and I liked having him as a team-mate," he said. "But the attitude of Andrea and his entourage... for me, respect for people is important, and his entourage, and especially him, do not have it."

And you have to imagine the pair will find themselves up against one another on a regular basis, in and around the top six, and occasionally on the podium. Iannone demonstrated an instant liking for Suzuki's sweet handling GSX-RR in Valencia while Dovizioso's run of second-fourth-first during the flyaways proved he and Ducati were getting better

all the time. And with Lorenzo's input that can only continue.

Zarco v Lowes v Rins (and Folger)

2016 deprived us of a rookie of the year contest worthy of mention. What a change one year on, as three of Moto2's chief protagonists in 2015/'16 - Johann Zarco, Sam Lowes and Alex Rins - find themselves in well run, established top class teams. And all with a useful yardstick against which to measure themselves. Naturally, with any riders vying for a title, there is history there, notably between Zarco and Lowes. While the Englishman admirably smiled and sportingly offered a congratulatory hand to the Frenchman in front of the cameras in Valencia, memories of that Silverstone incident, which decisively cut him adrift of the Moto2 summit, won't have faded.

The softly spoken and, at times, overly timid Rins also has a point to prove, after a baffling end to 2016 that saw his Moto2 hopes fade with a whimper. All experienced contrasting fortunes at Valencia, with Zarco's Tech 3 Yamaha team-mate Jonas Folger (another rookie) outpacing them all. Although injury pock-marked Lowes and Rins' end of year, full factory backing from Aprilia and Suzuki should push them on once up to speed. With Zarco working with countryman and technical wizard Guy Coulon aboard a sorted, user-friendly machine, there's no reason the four rookies won't be packed together more often than not.

And finally, Jorge Lorenzo v the world

This could yet be the biggest story of the year. For the first time in nine seasons, Lorenzo will line up on a machine that isn't a Yamaha. And boy, does he feel he has a point to prove. His desire to stick it to Rossi and the Japanese factory for whom he won three world titles will be without question. Then there is the small matter of re-establishing himself as Spain's number one. With a factory fully behind him once more, don't count him out just yet.

SHIFT

Something of a surprise to see Ken Roczen out of Fox gear for the first time since he came on the international scene as a fifteen year old in 2009 but the fuss around his Shift 3Lue Label last weekend shows just how much the German is regarded by the American firm (and custodian of the Shift brand) and perhaps how he has become the principal athlete for their development and prototyping work. The 3Lue for Anaheim was a case of showcasing the latest output from the 'Moto-X Lab' – an ideas scheme – in limited edition form and with just 300 kits available worldwide. From what we can gather the jersey and pants take Fox's Flexair theme to new extremes in terms of lightness and functional fit. TruDri and four way stretch fabric form the base of the 'Risen' jersey while the pants feature 'taped interior seams that increase comfort and reduce restriction while decreasing overall weight.' The pants are also made of a Cordura stretch Nylon chassis that allows full movement but also means they are pretty resistant (the same is used on the Fox Legion enduro line). It seems like Shift have taken the first step to 'upping' the Flexair in terms of a riding experience so it is curious what Fox will be coming up with this summer. For more look at:

www.shiftmx.com







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TM

By Roland Brown
Photos by M. Campelli/S. Romero

KTM'S 1290 SUPER DUKE R IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE AUSTRIAN'S FLAGSHIP STREET MODELS. IT IS WITHOUT DOUBT A STUNNING PIECE OF MACHINERY...BUT MATTIGHOFEN THOUGHT THEY COULD DO BETTER. ROLAND WENT TO DOHA TO FIND OUT HOW KTM HAVE PRODDED & ROUSED THE BEAST

ANIMAL INSTINCTS



2017 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R



First time round, it was nicknamed the Beast. KTM's 1290 Super Duke R snarled onto the scene as a powerful V-twin prototype; a star of promotional movies and on Goodwood's Festival hill. But although the production model that reached showrooms in 2014 blasted out 170bhp and was seriously fast and agile, its refinement and rideability led to suggestions that the Beast was... well, if not tamed, then not all that wild either.

Enter the bike that KTM is calling Beast 2.0 – a revamped 1290 Super Duke R built for added performance and aggression. Last year's introduction of a more versatile, sports-touring 1290 Super Duke, the GT, has encouraged the Austrian firm to take the original model in the opposite direction. The new R-bike is more powerful, firmer and even more hardcore.

It's certainly every bit as naked. Its style set by an eye-catching, low-slung headlight whose central aluminium structure helps cool the LED lenses while supporting much of the light's structure. Elsewhere there's sharp-toothed bodywork, a colourful new TFT (Thin Film Transistor) instrument panel, and a slimmed-down tailpiece that contributes to the predatory look.

The 1301cc, 75-degree motor remains on display, and is revised to get the KTM through Euro 4 emissions tests, while also making an extra 4bhp to lift maximum output to 174bhp – serious stomp by naked bike standards. Internal changes include new titanium inlet valves and higher compression ratio. The extra power comes from revving 500rpm higher, helped by shorter intake trumpets and a new exhaust system.



2017 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R



*"IT'S CERTAINLY EVERY BIT AS NAKED.
A STYLE SET BY AN EYE-CATCHING, LOW-
SLUNG HEADLIGHT...ELSEWHERE THERE'S
SHARP-TOOTHED BODYWORK..."*



2017 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R





2017 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R



*"THIS RACIER SUPER DUKE SHOULD PROVE
A RESPECTABLY GOOD ALL-ROUNDER AS
WELL AS AN EXHILARATING MACHINE FOR
BLASTING ON STREET OR TRACK..."*

FEATURE

There's no change to the tubular steel frame or chassis geometry, but the WP forks get firmer springs, and the shock's standard settings are stiffened slightly with more preload and damping. As before, the brake system features Brembo's 320mm front discs and M50 Monobloc calipers, now upgraded with cornering ABS thanks to Bosch's latest Inertial Measurement Unit.

The riding position continues the sportier theme: the slightly wider one-piece handlebar is a touch lower and further forward. You still sit fairly upright in the tall seat, with generous leg-room from the unchanged footrests. And there's still nothing to deflect the breeze when you twist the throttle, and the Super Duke leaps forward with a muted V-twin bark and the promise of impeccably controlled menace.

The previous 1290 was as refined as it was powerful, and that very much remains true of its successor. In either its Street or slightly more responsive Sport riding modes (there's also a softer Rain), the Super Duke accelerates hard but smoothly. In the lower gears it pulls from 2000rpm, effortlessly storming through the midrange yet keeping its front wheel down in improbably restrained fashion, thanks to the built-in anti-wheelie control.

Talking of which, some riders complained that the outgoing 1290's anti-wheelie system was difficult to disengage, and that this couldn't be done without also disabling the traction control system. That comment has been addressed, but only if the new bike is upgraded with the Track Pack accessory, which also adds a sharper Track riding mode plus a launch control function for easy, throttle-wide-open drag starts.

The chassis is excellent for roadgoing use, its firmed-up but still fairly long-travel suspension giving a comfortably supple ride.



The KTM is light, at 195kg dry, and steers with great precision in response to light pressure on that wide handlebar. It also works well on track, although for heavier riders the rear shock is on the soft side, which can make the bike feel slightly vague and cause it to squat and twitch its bars under full-bore acceleration.

And boy, does the Super Duke R like to accelerate. Its mighty power output is teamed with sublime throttle response, plus the safety net of the ultra-sophisticated traction control system. With the optional Performance Pack fitted, the KTM also benefits from a quick-shifter that allows efficient, clutch-free changes both up and down through the box.

That helps make the bike quicker as well as easier to ride as it rips towards its 160mph-plus top speed, though the ride soon gets blustery even with the pilot crouched as low as possible over the tank. On the street the naked riding position will add to the impression of speed. Great in fine weather; less so in the cold or rain.

Even so, this racier Super Duke should prove a respectably good all-rounder as well as an exhilarating machine for blasting on street or track. And if some potential owners will be disappointed that some new features are optional extras, that seems fair enough given that the basic price is unchanged in many markets (£13,999 in the UK) since the original 1290's launch in 2014.

That first Super Duke R combined its power with agility and electronic sophistication. Now its successor takes a step further in each direction, while adding a fresh look and a host of valuable options. Beast 2.0 can hardly be described as wild, but it certainly can be ferocious – and its extra aggression and refinement make for an even more formidable super-naked contender.





BACKPAGE

Movistar Yamaha girls
by Yamaha





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'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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Thanks to www.mototribu.com

PHOTO CREDITS

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Cover shot: Ken Roczen winning Anaheim I. By Cudby/Shepherd

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